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STATE FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A, S/CRS, S/CT,
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SUBJECT: COUNSELOR COHEN DISCUSSES AFGHAN SECURITY WITH
MINISTERS OF DEFENSE AND INTERIOR

REF: KABUL 1727

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Carol A. Rodley, for reasons 1.4 b, d.

11. (C) Counselor Cohen reviewed Afghanistan's internal and external security situation in recent meetings with Minister of Defense Wardak and Minister of Interior Zarar Moqbel. Wardak emphasized the need for a larger, more capable, and better equipped Afghan National Army. According to his calculations, the ANA should number approximately 170,000 troops. While he recognized that this would create a sustainment burden that Afghanistan could only gradually take on, he argued that in the long run an Afghanistan that could defend itself would be less expensive for the United States than deploying U.S. troops. Minister Zarar emphasized that the police are unavoidably involved in the counterinsurgency fight in Afghanistan, noting that 124 police were killed in less than two months. He said his ministry is working hard to eliminate corruption and end drug cultivation. Both Wardak and Zarar described their views of the role played by Afghanistan's neighbors - Iran, Pakistan, and Russia. End summary.

12. (C) In a May 8 meeting with Counselor Cohen, Minister of Defense Wardak said that he is optimistic regarding Afghanistan's security situation but noted that the past several years started with several wrong assumptions. He said that the Afghan National Army (ANA) was designed as a light infantry force and supplied with old, malfunctioning equipment. That situation is now being rectified but in the meantime much time was lost. He emphasized that the size of the ANA (70,000 troops) was not based on an analysis of internal or external threats. He said that the force size needs to be considered in light of an eventual withdrawal of ISAF and Coalition forces. Regarding sustainment for this larger force, Wardak said that the Afghan economy is improving every year,

and each year the GOA takes on a larger amount of the sustainment cost. However in any case sustaining the ANA will be less expensive for the U.S. than deploying American troops to the region.

ANA: 170,000

¶3. (C) Wardak argued that based on several quick analyses and comparison with neighboring forces, he calculates an appropriate size for the ANA is approximately 170,000 troops. The actual mission of the ANA should be to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity and to reinforce law enforcement as required. However he hopes that over the next 10 years the ANA will gradually be relieved of the policing mission it is now compelled to undertake due to the weakness of the Afghan National Police (ANP). He said that the ANA is trying to help and cooperate with the ANP but first the ANP has to reach an effective standard of professionalism.

Regional Threats

¶4. (C) Wardak suggested that a larger ANA would also reduce the threat from Afghanistan,s neighbors - Pakistan, Iran, and Russia - who recognize strength and right now are attempting to meddle in Afghanistan,s internal affairs. Regarding Pakistan, he said that during the war with the Soviets, the Pakistani people did everything they could to help the Afghans, but even at that time the government of

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Pakistan had different designs - it has always been focused on the need for "strategic depth." Moreover, Wardak argued, former Pakistani President Zia ul Haq dreamed of a greater "Islamistan" stretching from Pakistan to Central Asia, and that aspiration remains part of the Pakistani psyche. Wardak said that Iran is training and equipping Taliban on the western border, including IED training. He argued that Russia has also begun meddling in Afghanistan,s affairs. All three countries, he claimed, do not want a stable Afghanistan that can serve as a transit route for good for central Asia, and Russia and Iran in particular do not like the presence of international forces here.

Role of Police

¶5. (C) Minister of Interior Zarar Moqbil also reviewed security issues in his May 8 meeting with Counselor Cohen, but concentrated on the internal security situation. He noted that in the 55 day period ending May 8, 124 police patrolmen had been killed, mostly by suicide bombs or IEDs. He said it needs to be recognized that right now the police are engaged in fighting. They have no choice, he said - they have to defend themselves. He explained that the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) program was devised in order to give the police the training they need to survive in this environment. (See reftel on ANCOP.)

¶6. (C) Zarar said there is still a need to improve cooperation between the ANP and ANA. Moreover, some problems remain in coordinating operations with ISAF and the Coalition. Independent operations by international forces can cause tension between the international community and the government and people of Afghanistan, he said.

¶7. (C) Counselor Cohen remarked on the importance of fighting corruption. Zarar agreed, noting that some

steps have been taken such as removing 40 police generals and improving salary distribution to the police. He said that MOI has conducted several training programs aimed at fighting against administrative corruption, and has submitted 27 cases of alleged corruption within the Ministry to the Attorney General for further investigation.

Counternarcotics: MOI Supports Aerial Spraying

18. (C) The Counselor noted that corruption can't be solved without concurrent progress on counternarcotics. He asked what MOI is doing to get a handle on this difficult issue. Zarar responded by saying that in provinces where there is sufficient security, the amount of poppy cultivation has declined. He added that the MOI strongly supports aerial spraying, but the Ministries of Public Health and Agriculture are firmly opposed and those organizations that supported were not able to make a strong enough case to convince the GOA leadership. He said that the GOA and international community need to come up with a serious plan to focus counternarcotics activity against areas where the Taliban are protecting poppy farmers. We also need to create employment in these areas as a viable alternative, he said.

Iranian Interference

19. (C) Regarding Iran, Zarar said that the Iranians

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are active in Herat but are also creating political allies in the North. They are working the religious side in the central provinces, which have a predominantly Shi,ah population. He said that one of the factional leaders in Shindand, Herat province, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad, has a direct connection with the Spahi Pasdaran and Velayati-i Faqih. Pasdaran has also created areas of influence in Daikundi Province, between Kijran and Gizab districts, and the Iranians have been using that area as a base for further activity. He said that in Reg district, Kandahar province, the ANP recently arrested some individuals in possession of bombs that had been made in Iran.

110. (C) However, Zarar emphasized that the problems with Iran are periodic; the biggest problem for Afghanistan,s security is the extremist training centers in Pakistan. He noted that the fighting along the border with Pakistan stems from deep causes and will require time to solve, but urged the U.S. to focus its efforts there. Counselor Cohen said that the U.S. government understands this issue and is here to help.

111. (U) The delegation has cleared this cable.
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